

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Human Services to which was referred House Bill No.
3 91 entitled “An act relating to the Emergency Temporary Shelter Program”
4 respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the
5 bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in
6 lieu thereof the following:

7 * * * Findings and Legislative Intent * * *

8 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

9 The General Assembly finds that:

10 (1) according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
11 Development’s 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report, Vermont had
12 the fourth highest rate of homelessness in 2024 in that 53 of every 10,000
13 Vermonters are experiencing homelessness, with only Hawaii, New York, and
14 Oregon experiencing higher rates;

15 (2) in 2023, according to the same Annual Homelessness Assessment
16 Report, 51 of every 10,000 Vermonters were experiencing homelessness;

17 (3) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, there were
18 approximately 3,458 unhoused individuals in Vermont, which represents a 300
19 percent increase over the 1,110 unhoused individuals prior to the COVID-19
20 pandemic in 2020;

1 (4) of the 3,458 unhoused individuals in Vermont identified by the
2 Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, 166 experienced unsheltered
3 homelessness, which is the highest count of unsheltered homeless individuals
4 in Vermont within the past decade;

5 (5) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, over 35
6 percent of those Vermonters experiencing homelessness were unhoused for
7 more than one year and over 72 percent were unhoused for more than 90 days;

8 (6) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, 737 of those
9 Vermonters experiencing homelessness were children and youth under 18
10 years of age and 646 were 55 years of age or older;

11 (7) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, Black
12 Vermonters are 5.6 times more likely to be unhoused as compared to white
13 Vermonters;

14 (8) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that 36,000
15 primary homes are needed in Vermont between 2025–2029, 3,295 of which are
16 needed to address homelessness; and

17 (9) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that “[h]alf of
18 all Vermont renters are cost-burdened, and one-in-four pay more than 50
19 [percent] of their income on housing costs, putting them at high risk of
20 eviction,” which “is heightened by Vermont’s rental vacancy rate of 3
21 [percent], which is well below the 5 [percent] rate of a healthy market.”

1 Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

2 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly that unsheltered homelessness
3 be eliminated and that homelessness in Vermont be rare, brief, and
4 nonrecurring.

5 (b) It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Vermont Homeless
6 Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
7 established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is a step toward ensuring that:

8 (1) homelessness be reduced in Vermont and interim shelter
9 opportunities be available to provide a stable pathway to permanent housing
10 for all Vermonters experiencing homelessness, including safe shelter options
11 for individuals living in unsheltered homelessness;

12 (2) Vermont increase the supply of emergency temporary and
13 transitional shelter as well as permanent supportive housing that meets the
14 specific needs of individuals;

15 (3) community components of all shelter types are integrated in a
16 systemic manner;

17 (4) time limits, night-by-night shelter, relocation between interim shelter
18 sites, and other disruptions in housing stability be eliminated to the extent
19 possible;

20 (5) Vermont’s emergency housing statutes, rules, policies, procedures,
21 and practices be modeled on Housing First principles; and

1 § 2203. DEFINITIONS

2 As used in this chapter:

3 (1) “At-risk of homelessness” means in peril of imminently losing a
4 primary, night-time residence.

5 (2) “Community action agency” means an agency designated pursuant 3
6 V.S.A. chapter 59.

7 (3) “Community-based shelter” means a shelter that meets the
8 Department’s standards for the operation of shelters.

9 (4) “Department” means the Department for Children and Families.

10 (5) “Extreme weather event” means extreme hot or cold temperatures or
11 weather events, such as hurricanes, flooding, or blizzards, that create
12 hazardous conditions for outdoor habitation by humans.

13 (6) “Homeless” means lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime
14 residence.

15 (7) “Household” means an individual and any dependents for whom the
16 individual is legally responsible and who live and intend to stay in Vermont.

17 “Household” includes individuals who reside together as one economic unit,
18 including those who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried.

19 (8) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not
20 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation.

1 § 2204. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY
2 ASSISTANCE AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING
3 PROGRAM

4 (a) The Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
5 Transition to Housing Program is established in the Department and shall be
6 operated by community action agencies, to the extent funds exist. Community
7 action agencies shall collaborate with with other community partners,
8 including municipalities, the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, Balance
9 of State Continuum of Care, and local housing coalitions. The Program shall
10 utilize coordinated entry and shall utilize, but not duplicate, the work of the
11 community partners. It shall include the following components:

12 (1) supportive services to assist households experiencing homelessness
13 or those households that are at-risk of homelessness pursuant to section 2205
14 of this chapter:

15 (2) extreme weather event shelters operated or caused to be operated by
16 a community action agency pursuant section 2206 of this chapter; and

17 (3) emergency shelters, either temporary or transitional, operated or
18 caused to be operated by a community action agency pursuant to section 2207
19 of this chapter.

20 (b) The Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
21 Transition to Housing Program shall include supportive services and shelters

1 specific to households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic
2 and sexual violence, which shall be provided or caused to be provided by a
3 statewide organization with population-specific service experience pursuant to
4 section 2208 of this section.

5 § 2205. SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

6 A community action agency, in collaboration with other community
7 partners, shall offer or cause to be offered the following supportive services,
8 which may vary in terms of manner and extent depending on the level of
9 shelter a household utilizes or whether the household is at risk of homelessness
10 or experiencing homelessness:

11 (1) intake assessments and services for diversion from homelessness;

12 (2) household needs assessments;

13 (3) individualized household plans to address identified needs;

14 (4) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial
15 assistance;

16 (5) referrals to other services and supports;

17 (6) peer-supported services;

18 (7) landlord-tenant outreach, education, and conflict resolution;

19 (8) housing navigation services;

20 (9) advocacy; and

21 (10) progress monitoring and interventions.

1 § 2206. EXTREME WEATHER EVENT SHELTER

2 A community action agency shall operate or cause to be operated shelters in
3 the State that shall be used during extreme weather events to shelter any
4 homeless individual who seeks shelter. The community action agencies, in
5 collaboration with community partners, shall prioritize funding for extreme
6 weather event shelters by utilizing data available under this section and
7 considering geographic access. A shelter offered pursuant to this section
8 during an extreme weather event may include time-limited congregate
9 accommodations and may be provided through grants to municipalities or
10 other entities.

11 § 2207. EMERGENCY SHELTERS

12 (a) Temporary shelter. A community action agency shall serve or cause to
13 be served, at a minimum and in a manner that complies with and builds upon
14 the federally required community planning process, households that are
15 prioritized and in need of the services of a temporary shelter. A community
16 action agency may provide or cause to be provided temporary shelter through
17 community-based shelters, temporary use of hotels or motels, lease agreements
18 for full or partial use of an existing building, need-specific shelter
19 arrangements, or other arrangements or combinations of arrangements that
20 comply with the intent of this chapter.

1 chapter. If a community action agency cannot fulfil its responsibilities under
2 this chapter, the Department shall work with other community action agencies
3 or other appropriate community entities to ensure that there is not a gap in
4 services in a community action agency’s region.

5 (b) A community action agency providing or causing to provide services in
6 accordance with this chapter shall:

7 (1) have existing or planned infrastructure to support households in the
8 region, including an established leadership team, a human resources staff, and
9 the ability to receive grant funding and issue subgrants;

10 (2) have the ability to meet the Department’s reporting requirements,
11 including past history of reporting compliance;

12 (3) have community connections with other providers in the region,
13 including providers of coordinated entry, local housing coalitions, housing
14 providers, mental health and disability services, substance use disorder
15 services, and services for older Vermonters; and

16 (4) provide plain language communications to clients.

17 § 2210. VHEARTH; DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT

18 (a) The Agency of Human Services, working with the Department, shall
19 have statewide responsibility for meeting the intent of this chapter, including
20 statewide planning, system development, and the involvement of all the
21 Agency’s departments.

1 **(b)** For the purpose of providing administrative oversight and monitoring of
2 the Program established in this chapter, the Department shall:

3 (1)(A) adopt guidance regarding when extreme weather event shelters
4 shall be operated, including flexibility for regional weather conditions; and

5 (B) maintain a website with the locations of all extreme weather
6 event shelters;

7 (2) include as part of any review of a community action agency required
8 pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59, the community action agency’s ability to
9 perform the requirements of this chapter;

10 (3)(A) consult with the community action agencies and the statewide
11 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
12 domestic and sexual violence pursuant to section 2208 of this chapter, to
13 develop appropriate resource allocations and methods for adjustment that take
14 into account available data, the presence of community-based providers, and
15 customary resource allocation methods, economic indicators, rate of
16 homelessness, rental vacancy rates, and other variables, as appropriate; and

17 (B) annually, distribute funding to each community action agency
18 and the statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that
19 have experienced domestic and sexual violence pursuant to section 2208 of this
20 chapter using the allocation formula developed pursuant to subdivision (A) of
21 this subdivision (3), or if the Department and community action agencies

1 agree, disperse a joint allocation for all community action agencies, which the
2 community action agencies shall determine how to distribute amongst
3 themselves;

4 (4) consult with the community action agencies and the statewide
5 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
6 domestic and sexual violence pursuant to section 2208 of this chapter to
7 develop appropriate measures and methods for accountability of the
8 community action agencies' and the statewide organization's execution of
9 duties under this chapter, including the provision of any previously agreed
10 upon information to enable the Department to evaluate the services provided
11 through grant funds, the effect on households receiving services, and an
12 accounting of expended grant funds;

13 (5) provide support and technical assistance to the community action
14 agencies and the statewide organization serving households that are
15 experiencing or that have experienced domestic and sexual violence pursuant
16 to section 2208 of this chapter;

17 (6) identify specific administrative resources that could be transitioned
18 to community operations;

19 (7) develop and submit standards for the operation of community-based
20 shelters;

1 (8) adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25, in consultation with the
2 community action agencies and the statewide organization serving households
3 that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic and sexual violence
4 pursuant to section 2208 of this chapter, as appropriate, for the implementation
5 of this chapter, including accommodations for individuals with a disability.

6 § 2211. REGIONAL PLANNING; NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

7 (a) As part of the plan required pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 and the
8 federally required planning and needs assessments for the continuums of care,
9 the community action agencies shall develop a regional needs assessment for
10 use in each community action agency’s region to inform future plans
11 addressing housing and homelessness in each region of the State. The plans
12 shall include:

13 (1) addressing progress in reducing the number of households
14 experiencing homelessness in a region;

15 (2) assessing the rate households placed in permanent housing return to
16 homelessness and the underlying reasons;

17 (3) identifying resources developed and utilized in the region to address
18 homelessness;

19 (4) reporting the rate of household participation with coordinated entry
20 processes and case management services;

1 (5) identifying system gaps and the funding needed to address those
2 gaps, including periodic inflationary adjustments; and

3 (6) utilizing data, including Vermont’s Point-in-Time Count,
4 coordinated entry assessment results, and community conversations.

5 (b) Each community action agency shall submit plans developed pursuant
6 to this section to the Department in a format prescribed by the Department.

7 The Department shall aggregate the results of these reports and submit the
8 aggregated report to the House Committee on Human Services and to the
9 Senate Committee on Health and Welfare.

10 § 2212. USE OF HOTEL AND MOTEL ROOMS

11 (a) Hotels and motels providing emergency shelter pursuant to this chapter
12 shall comply with Program rules and shall comply with the following:

13 (1) Department of Health, Licensed Lodging Establishment Rule (CVR
14 13-140-023); and

15 (2) Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety
16 Code (CVR 28-070-001).

17 (b) Annually, the Department shall propose hotel and motel rates as part of
18 its budget presentation for approval by the General Assembly. A community
19 action agency shall not pay or cause to be paid with State monies a per room,
20 per night basis that exceeds the rate approved by the General Assembly.

1 (c) To the extent possible when a hotel or motel is being utilized:

2 (1) a community action agency shall enter into agreements for the use of
3 blocks of hotel and motel rooms and negotiate the conditions of use for those
4 blocks, including access for providers of case management or other supportive
5 services; and

6 (2) when appropriate for the household, prioritize the household’s use
7 over individual per room shelter use.

8 Sec. 4. VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE AND
9 RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING PROGRAM
10 IMPLEMENTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

11 (a) Creation. There is created the Vermont Homeless Emergency
12 Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program Implementation
13 Advisory Committee to provide advice and recommendations to the
14 Commissioner for Children and Families and to the community action agencies
15 as defined in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 regarding the design, implementation, and
16 transition to the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
17 Transition to Housing Program established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22, including
18 advice and recommendations on the implementation plan required pursuant to
19 Sec. 5 of this act.

20 (b) Membership. The Advisory Committee’s membership shall reflect the
21 growing diversity among Vermonters, including individuals who are Black,

1 Indigenous, and Persons of Color, as well as with regard to socioeconomic
2 status, geographic location, gender, sexual identity, and disability status and
3 shall be composed of:

4 (1) five representatives with lived experience of homelessness,
5 appointed by the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance and the Balance of
6 State Continuum of Care;

7 (2) five representatives, one appointed by each of the community action
8 agencies;

9 (3) one representative, appointed by the Chittenden County Homeless
10 Alliance;

11 (4) one representative, appointed by the Balance of State Continuum of
12 Care;

13 (5) five representatives of local housing coalitions, including at least two
14 of whom are shelter providers, appointed jointly by the Chittenden County
15 Homeless Alliance and the Balance of State Continuum of Care;

16 (6) the Deputy Commissioner of the Department for Children and
17 Families' Economic Services Division or designee; and

18 (7) the Director of the Department for Children and Families' Office of
19 Economic Opportunity or designee.

20 (c) Assistance. The Advisory Committee shall have the administrative,
21 technical, and legal assistance of the Department for Children and Families.

1 (d) Meetings.

2 (1) The Commissioner shall call the first meeting of the Advisory
3 Committee to occur on or before July 15, 2025.

4 (2) The Committee shall select co-chairs from among its members at the
5 first meeting at least one of whom is not a State employee.

6 (3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

7 (4) The Advisory Committee may divide into subcommittees to carry
8 out its duties under this section and subcommittees may include individuals not
9 appointed to the Advisory Committee pursuant to subsection (b) of this
10 section, including representatives of individuals who are older Vermonters,
11 individuals who have disabilities or a mental health condition, individuals
12 reentering the community after incarceration, and families with children.

13 (e) Compensation and reimbursement. Members of the Advisory
14 Committee shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of
15 expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than 12 meetings
16 annually. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the
17 Department.

18 (f) Sunset. The Advisory Committee shall cease to exist on July 1, 2029.

19 Sec. 5. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

20 On or before February 1, 2026, the Department for Children and Families,
21 in collaboration with community action agencies and in consultation with the

1 departments of the Agency of Human Services and the Vermont Homeless
2 Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
3 Implementation Advisory Committee established pursuant to Sec. 4 of this act,
4 shall submit a plan to the House Committee on Human Services and to the
5 Senate Committee on Health and Welfare for the implementation of the
6 Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
7 Housing Program established by 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 that ensures maximum
8 flexibility for the use of resources and streamlines processes for Program
9 participants. Specifically, the implementation plan shall address:

10 (1) funding allocations among the community action agencies and other
11 providers, including for services specific to households that are experiencing or
12 that have experienced domestic or sexual violence;

13 (2) additional State and federal funding sources identified for the
14 Program;

15 (3) appropriate measures and methods of accountability in fulfilling the
16 intent of this act for community action agencies, the organization serving
17 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic and sexual
18 violence, and community partners;

19 (4) appropriate supportive services specific to the level of shelter a
20 household utilizes, or whether the household is at risk of homelessness, or
21 experiencing unsheltered homelessness;

- 1 (5) establishing an appeals process that includes a hearing before the
- 2 Human Services Board and an option for an expedited appeals process;
- 3 (6) expanded use of 211 within the intake system;
- 4 (7) whether continuation in emergency shelter should include an
- 5 expectation regarding household participation in case management services or
- 6 other expectations such as night limits on this use of hotels and motels, and if
- 7 so, what elements and in what circumstances participation in case management
- 8 services or other expectations should be applied;
- 9 (8) whether the use of emergency shelter should include financial
- 10 participation, and if so, what that participation should include;
- 11 (9) how prioritization should occur for emergency temporary shelter and
- 12 what priority categories should exist within those parameters;
- 13 (10) how to best ensure that there is equitable access to shelter and
- 14 supportive services for households experiencing homelessness;
- 15 (11) the appropriate level of required intake and assessment processes
- 16 for each of the various levels of shelter that a household may utilize for
- 17 households that are at risk of homelessness and for households experiencing
- 18 unsheltered homelessness; and
- 19 (12) any anticipated challenges requiring a legislative solution.

1 § 3902. OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

2 (a) The Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity is hereby
3 authorized to allocate available financial assistance for community ~~services~~
4 action agencies and programs in accordance with State and federal law and
5 regulation.

6 (b) The Director may provide financial assistance to community ~~services~~
7 action agencies for the planning, conduct, administration, and evaluation of
8 community ~~service~~ action programs to provide a range of services and
9 activities having a measurable and potentially major impact on causes of
10 poverty in the community or in areas of the community where poverty is a
11 particularly acute problem. Components of those services and activities may
12 involve, without limitation of other activities and supporting facilities designed
13 to assist ~~low-income~~ participants with low income:

14 (1) to secure and retain meaningful employment;

15 (2) to obtain adequate education;

16 (3) to make better use of available income;

17 (4) to ~~provide and maintain adequate housing and a suitable living~~

18 ~~environment~~ have access to safe, secure, permanent housing;

19 (5) to obtain prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery services

20 ~~for the prevention of narcotics addiction, alcoholism, and for the rehabilitation~~

21 ~~of narcotic addicts and alcoholics~~ individuals with substance use disorder;

1 (6) to obtain emergency assistance through loans and grants to meet
2 immediate and urgent individual and family needs, including the need for
3 health services, nutritious food, housing, and unemployment-related assistance;

4 (7) to remove obstacles and solve personal and family problems ~~which~~
5 that block achievement of self-sufficiency;

6 (8) to achieve greater participation in the affairs of the community;

7 (9) to make more frequent and effective use of other programs related to
8 the purposes of this chapter; and

9 (10) to coordinate and establish linkages between governmental and
10 other social service programs to ~~assure~~ ensure the effective delivery of such
11 services to ~~low-income~~ persons; with low income and to encourage the use of
12 entities in the private sector of the community in efforts to ameliorate poverty
13 in the community.

14 (c) The Director is authorized to adopt rules pursuant to chapter 25 of this
15 title appropriate to the carrying out of this chapter and the purposes thereof.

16 § 3903. DESIGNATION OF AGENCIES TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND
17 ACTIVITIES TO AMELIORATE OR ELIMINATE POVERTY

18 The Director shall designate private nonprofit community based
19 organizations ~~who~~ that have demonstrated or ~~who~~ that can demonstrate the
20 ability to provide services and activities as defined in subsection 3902(b) of
21 this title as community ~~services~~ action agencies.

1 § 3904. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCY PLAN

2 Each designated community ~~services~~ action agency shall determine the need
3 for activities and services within the area served by the agency and shall
4 thereafter prepare a community services plan ~~which~~ that describes the method
5 by which the agency will provide those services. The plan shall include a
6 schedule for the anticipated provision of new or additional services and shall
7 specify the resources ~~which~~ that are needed by and available to the agency to
8 implement the plan. The community services plan shall be completed every
9 three years and updated annually. The plan shall include the regional needs
10 assessment required under 33 V.S.A. § 2211.

11 § 3905. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCIES;

12 ADMINISTRATION

13 (a) Each community ~~services~~ action agency shall administer its programs as
14 set out in the community services plan and as approved by its board of
15 directors.

16 (b) Each board of a nonprofit community-based organization that is
17 designated a community ~~services~~ action agency under section 3903 of this
18 chapter shall have an executive committee of not more than seven members
19 who shall be representative of the composition of the board and the board shall
20 be so constituted that:

21 * * *

1 (2) \$500,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for
2 contractual and other system transformation assistance; and
3 (3) \$3,000,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for the
4 continued development of shelter capacity in the State, such as recovery
5 housing, housing for individuals with disabilities, family housing, and
6 transitional housing for individuals exiting the custody of the Commissioner of
7 Corrections.

8 Sec. 8. FUTURE APPROPRIATIONS; LEGISLATIVE INTENT

9 It is the intent of the General Assembly that in fiscal year 2027 and
10 thereafter, equivalent funds and resources, base and one-time, used in fiscal
11 year 2025 for General Assistance emergency housing and the Housing
12 Opportunity Grant Program be redesignated for the Vermont Homeless
13 Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
14 pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter 22.

15 * * * Effective Dates * * *

16 Sec. 9. EFFECTIVE DATES

17 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025, except that Sec. 3 (Vermont
18 Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing
19 Program) shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

1 and that after passage the title of the bill be amended to read: “An act
2 relating to the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
3 Transition to Housing Program”

4

5 (Committee vote: _____)

6

7

Representative _____

8

FOR THE COMMITTEE